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ABSTRACT

This brief summarizes research on day care availability, quality, and costs and offers recommendations for improving these issues. Examples of summarized facts include: (1) children in poor quality child care are often delayed in language and reading skills and display more aggression toward other children and adults; (2) a large study of child care centers indicated that about 86 percent provided mediocre or poor-quality services; and (3) time taken away from work in order to provide family care costs the economy more than $11 billion in lost production each year. Recommendations focus on increased facilities, funding, education, and flexibility. (EV)

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# Equity Research

# What Do We Know About the Availability, Quality, and Affordability of Childcare?

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Children who are in high-quality childcare programs are more likely to be emotionally secure, proficient in language use, able to regulate aggressiveness, and cognitively advanced, at least in the short term (CFC, 1996).

Children in poor quality childcare are often delayed in language and reading skills, and display more aggression toward other children and adults (Adams & Schulman, 1998).

Research indicates there is consistent evidence of a low supply of care for infants, for school-age children, for children with disabilities and special health care needs, and for parents with unconventional, evening, night, or shifting work hours (CFC, 1996).

A large study of childcare centers indicated that about 86 percent of the centers in the study provided mediocre or poor-quality services (CFC, 1996).

A large study of family childcare and relative care rated only 9 percent of homes surveyed as good quality. The average provider was rated as nonresponsive or inappropriate in interactions with the children close to half the time (CFC, 1996).

About half of America's families with young children earn less than $35,000 per year. With two children under age 6 and both parents working full-time, these families can expect to spend about 23 percent of their income on childcare (CDF, 1998).

An Ohio family with two working parents working full-time at minimum wage ($21,400) with an infant and preschooler in childcare centers would spend about 42 percent of their income on childcare (Adams and Schulman, 1998).

From 1969 to 1996, families (on average) experienced a 14 percent decrease (about 22 hours a week) in the amount of available time they had to spend with their children (U.S. DOL, 2000).

Time taken away from work in order to provide family care costs the economy more than $11 billion in lost production each year (U.S. DOL, 2000).

Seventy-one percent of the mothers in two-earner families reported taking time off from work to handle a family emergency, such as the sudden illness of a child, in contrast to 15 percent of the fathers in these families (Moen, 1992).

Employed mothers with children under age 13 miss an average of 6.4 work days a year due to family-related issues (U.S. DOL, 2000).

Problems with childcare caused 20 percent of mothers receiving public assistance to quit school or a training program in the previous 12 months (CFC, 1996).

Parents are more likely to work if childcare is inexpensive, and they are less likely to miss work or leave their

*continued*

**1998 Annual Average Costs of Full-time Childcare***

| Age of Child | Cost in Childcare Center | Cost in Family Daycare Center |
|---|---|---|
| 12-month-old | $4940 | $4118 |
| 4-year-old | $4056 | $3900 |
| 8-year-old | $2216 | $2186 |

*In comparison, the 1997 average cost of tuition at a public university in Ohio is $3834.
Source: Adams & Schulman, 1998.

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jobs if childcare is stable, conveniently located, of good quality, and satisfactory to them (CFC, 1996).

Corporate childcare programs have increased companies' abilities to attract employees, lowered absenteeism, and improved employees' work commitment and retention (Gilbert, 1993).

## Recommendations

- Establish on-site childcare at educational facilities for students and school personnel to use.
- Schedule adult classes at times when students are more likely to obtain childcare.
- Increase childcare support services and other funds to subsidize childcare for students' children.
- Establish community childcare referral services to help secondary and adult students link to convenient, affordable, and quality childcare.
- Encourage employers to offer on-site childcare or to collaborate with other employers in offering childcare nearby.
- Support local community efforts to establish non-profit childcare during evenings, nights, and weekends.
- Educate all students about finding, identifying and monitoring quality childcare and the consequences of poor-quality childcare. Emphasize identifying strategies for securing reliable, quality childcare during evening, night, and weekend work hours and developing back-up childcare plans in case primary caregivers become unavailable.
- Use management and teaching strategies that increase flexibility when offering adult training programs, especially employer-sponsored programs (i.e., flexible scheduling of classroom and lab instruction, distance learning, and off-site learning).

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